

II. FACILITIES AND DESIGNS

From the outset, when the first One-Stop Career Centers were being created, states and their local sites indicated that they wanted their physical facilities to be tangible evidence—a visible symbol—of the new system and the ways in which this system was a significant improvement over the prior one. The external physical appearance of the facility that housed One-Stop Career Centers and the internal layout were thus given careful attention, particularly at the local level, to ensure that the design reflected the holistic goals and vision for all the services that were to be provided. Early goals as envisioned by state and local respondents were to create facilities that would be user-friendly, less “bureaucratic” in appearance, and designed for the easy access for all customers. By the early to mid-1990’s, most of the study sites had gained some experience with providing at least limited self services at their One-Stop Centers or at other locations, such as those housing JTPA Title III services. The positive community response from those using the Resource Rooms—from job seekers, employed professionals, youth, and older workers—convinced One-Stop leadership in the study sites that the space, resources, and technology-based equipment should be expanded and enhanced. Between 1996 and 1998, study sites moved aggressively to expand their self-services and information resources by renovating the existing site or moving to a new location. These transformations allowed the Centers to provide more on-site office space for partners, but equally important, it provided the opportunity to update and expand the self-directed services provided in their Resource Rooms.

An important goal is ensuring that the layout of the Resource Room promotes ease of use and offers a welcoming environment.

As a first step in the planning process, local sites, usually with support at the state level, developed strategies to ensure that all partners and relevant stakeholders could “have their say” to design the layout of the facilities, in particular those that would be incorporated into the self-service Resource Room. The feedback that was received through this process was used by decision makers to fine-tune their goals and to decide upon specific space-related features of the Center, such as the placement of customer meeting space and classrooms and staff offices, strategies to accommodate customer flow in the Resource

Room, and the placement of equipment (such as the banks of computers). Other considerations included elements that would improve the “ambiance” and attractiveness of the entire Center.

STATES’ GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNING SELF-SERVICE ENVIRONMENTS

States in which the local study sites were located typically established general guidelines and policies regarding design motifs or layouts to support self-services. These design elements, which were often developed with assistance from DOL-sponsored committees or technical assistance providers, were communicated to planners at the local level, who were directed to develop their self-service resource areas keeping universal design elements in mind, while also accommodating local needs and requirements. States also wanted to make certain that the range of customers would be adequately served, particularly those with special needs. (Please also refer to the chapter “Facilitating Access to Self-Services,” which discusses these issues in more detail.)

General design guidelines issued by states include ensuring easy accessibility of the facilities and electronic access to on-line resources.

State One-Stop planners assisted local planners to develop facility designs in line with standard principles established by the state in a number of ways. For example, state representatives in Texas and Minnesota participated with local committees during the planning process. Indiana, Florida and Texas also identified some local Centers as models that incorporated design elements in line with state principles and guidelines (two of the state-designated models, the *Melbourne Job Link Center* in Florida and the *Capital of Texas Workforce Center* in Texas, were our study sites).

State guidelines critical to the design of Resource Rooms included the following:

- *Easy accessibility of the One-Stop Center.* The location of the Centers was chosen to provide accessibility for all populations, including professionals as well as job seekers who use public transportation.
- *Traffic flow.* An open design plan that would be easy to navigate, contiguous Resource Room areas, and a reception area that allows for unobtrusive monitoring of activities and use of Resource Room equipment was promoted.
- *Providing adequate electronic access.* All states

representing study sites required that local Centers provide customer access to the Internet and the state's job matching system.

- *Configuring space and electronic hardware to accommodate persons with disabilities.* Basic components for wheelchair accessibility included: easy entry into the building, users' ability to navigate comfortably within the Resource Room, and accessibility to all resources. The latter includes appropriate counter and hard-copy shelf heights, adequate lighting, and accessibility to work stations.
- *Application of external construction and internal design features to dispel the image of a government building.* This included such items as lighting, furnishings and use of colors and textures.

DEVELOPING FACILITIES TO SUPPORT SELF-SERVICE GOALS

Local sites worked within these guidelines to ensure the adequacy of the resources and that all individuals would have access to valuable services. To do so, local site planners included in discussions those organizations and agencies that were advocates for targeted populations, such as State Services for the Blind, and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, as well as employer representatives. Though local exigencies were important, goals developed at each of the study sites were often quite similar, particularly with regard to the external look of the facility and the Resource Rooms. This section describes some of these local goals and how they were realized.

"We want the Resource Room to be the center of the Center."
— An administrator with the Bloomington WDC

External Design Features and Facility Accessibility

Site planners wanted the location of the Center to be accessible to a wide range of customers. As a consequence, key considerations included accessibility within the community, the ease of entering the building for persons with disabilities, and a welcoming facade.

Facility location within the community. For those sites that were able to move to a new location, access by proximity to public transportation, the convergence of several major highways, and adequate free parking were important considerations. Sites that remained at their existing locations often found other creative ways to serve the universal customer.

- Brevard County, which spans a 72- mile area along the coast, located its Centers near major metropolitan

areas. Because bus service is not available to some of the larger Centers, like the *Melbourne Job Link*, smaller Centers are located in public housing areas, where residents are less likely to own cars.

- At the *Bloomington Workforce Development Center* and the *Workforce Center of Anoka County* sites, the metropolitan bus-system schedule was modified to accommodate individuals using the Centers during business hours.
- The *Boston Work Place* is located near the city center, readily accessible via the subway system.

Access for individuals with physical disabilities. All the study sites are wheelchair accessible. Some sites have combined a pleasing design with accessibility for disabled individuals. For example, while the *Capital of Texas Workforce Center* is not visible from the exterior entrance, individuals who need assistance entering the Center may press a “doorbell” that rings in the Center. Other Centers, including those in *Anoka*, *Racine* and *Melbourne*, have double door-wide entryways into the resource area. This design feature also contributes to a feeling of spaciousness.

A welcoming external facade. Replacing the “bureaucratic image” of the former Job Service or Unemployment Insurance office with a more professional look was an important consideration that was reflected not only in the Centers’ internal designs, but in their external façades as well. Local One-Stop planners felt that the “look and feel” of the One-Stop facility from outside (or the entrance area when it was located within a building) were “first impressions” that initially influenced potential customers in important ways. Thus, floor to ceiling windows or glass windows with double glass doors were popular with site designers, because it allows individuals to “see in” to the resource area, while allowing staff the ability to assist those who may need help entering the building. Examples of sites with pleasing designs that have avoided the “government” look included the following:

- The *Racine Workforce Development Center* and the *Anoka County Workforce Center* are both located in multi-story facilities that house other human services offices, yet both buildings have pleasing modern exteriors with low steps leading to the front lobbies, set back from the parking lot.

All Centers, as a minimum, must be ADA compliant.

Customers’ first impressions of the Resource Room are important. Enabling passersby to “see-in” can serve to entice potential users.

- The *Boston Work Place* is located in a high rise office building among other professional offices.
- The *Capital of Texas Workforce Center*, in Austin, occupies 2 of the 3 floors of a modern building surrounded by trees. Large glass double doors allow the visitor to see the Center entrance (but not the interior of the Resource Room), and a large, colorful bulletin board just outside the entrance provides information about programs and services within the Center.
- The *Bloomington Workforce Development Center* is located in its own facility, a low, one-story building with glass doors and floor to ceiling windows.
- The *Melbourne Job Link Center* is located in the “elbow” of a one-story small strip mall. With its glass exterior, it allows individuals to view the resource area from the outside, revealing a layout much like a library.

Promoting Staff Accessibility

As will be discussed in Chapter III, our study sites quickly learned that Center customers needed at least periodic staff assistance, to help them use resources effectively. At the same time, One-Stop managers often found it challenging to fund extra staff to assist universal customers who were not enrolled in categorically-funded programs. To balance these concerns, they developed various layout configurations to facilitate the efficiency with which staff could be used and ensure that they could serve in multiple functions. Examples of the configurations that appeared to work well for universal customers using the Resource Room included the following:

- *Combining Reception Areas and Help Desk functions.* Several sites were successful in combining the One-Stop Center’s Reception Area and Resource Room Help Desk, by placing these functions together and strategically near both the entrances to the Center and the Resource Room.
 - At the *Melbourne Job Link Center*, the Reception/Help Desk counter can be seen from the glassed-in entrance. Staff assigned to this area greet visitors, monitor the Resource Room area, answer questions, and provide technical assistance with computers and software programs. They can also assist

Staff play a crucial role in Resource Rooms.

Configuring space to maximize staff efficiency is thus important.

individuals using the copier and fax machines as well as those using the telephones to contact employers.

- At the *Anoka County Workforce Center*, the Greeter's desk is situated near the entrance to the Resource Room. The Greeter may assist customers with brochures and general questions. Meanwhile, the computer technician, who is more likely to help users with their computer-based requirements, is located nearby, sitting behind a three-sided counter.
- At the *Austin Workforce Center*, a Greeter's desk is located behind the counter where customers log in on a computer. Two technical specialists have their desks behind the greeter and are available to assist all customers with hardware-related questions and tasks.
- *Help Desks that serve only Resource Room customers.* Several One-Stop Centers have placed Help Desks in the center of the Resource Room, in order to serve individuals in this area exclusively.
 - In the *Morrisville Career Resource Center*, the Help Desk divides two sections that serve universal customers. One side is reserved for Employment Service functions and has 5 computer terminals that are hooked up to statewide job listings and other resources. On the other side of the Help Desk are computer terminals with Internet access and hard copy resources, as well as assistive technology useful to individuals with disabilities.
 - The *Racine Workforce Development Center* Help Desk is located in the center of the Resource Room, which includes computer terminals and, off to one side, a resource library with comfortable chairs and tables.
 - The *Boston Work Place* Help Desk is located at the entrance to the Resource Library, and staff provide assistance to customers as needed.
- *“Professional” staff that serve Resource Room customers.* Several Centers configure offices in or very near the Resource Room to accommodate staff who both serve the general public and carry out more

specialized functions.

- The *Bloomington Workforce Development Center* has several counselors' offices located in the Resource Area. These counselors assist individuals with using computers, but they also provide counseling and testing and assessment services.
- The *Austin Workforce Center* has placed three ES counselors in offices adjacent to the Resource Room, so that they can assist customers with job matches and other job search activities.

Location and Layout of the Resource Room

All sites attempted to place the Resource Room in sight of, or near, the front entrance. Sites that had prior experience with resource areas located on another floor or in rooms adjacent to the main Center area indicated that it had been difficult to maintain staff adequate to assist Resource Room users and to monitor the use of the equipment in those areas. Planners indicated that placement of the Resource Room near the Center entrance was also important to help in attracting customers to try out the self-services that were available. Taking this principle even further, some Centers ensured that the Resource Room was visible from the street, behind large floor-to-ceiling windows

When space was available, Centers designated rooms for special services where privacy was required or the noise level might otherwise be distracting. Sites that lacked the luxury of having separate space to house separate self-service functions needed to make optimal use of the one large area that was available. In this case, they often designed the layout so that activities requiring concentration or a low noise level were placed in corners, or their own cubicles. They also ensured that areas most used by the general public would be in the front area—easily accessible—with meeting and classrooms near or behind the Resource Room, and staff offices on the perimeter or in the section further to the back of the building.

A balance must be struck between providing “openness” while making provisions for privacy and intimacy.

Designing Resource Rooms to be User-Friendly and Professional

Study sites all wanted to create an atmosphere for the Resource Room, and the Center as a whole, that was different from the previous system, considered by job seekers and employers alike to be unfriendly, difficult to access, and a place where, as one individual

termed it, “you had to park your dignity outside the door.”

Some successful attempts at changing that image have already been discussed, such as incorporating creative external physical features using glass, and using layouts that place Greeters and receptionists near the entrance to the Resource Rooms. The descriptive phrase most often used by sites was that they wanted their Resource Room to be like a modern library. Some sites incorporated this concept into the design of their self-service areas in the following ways.

- *Furnishings.* The *Bloomington Workforce Development Center* and *Racine Workforce Development Center* both included a few comfortable upholstered chairs and sofas near a small table, with lamps that made it easy for customers to read newspapers or brochures while they waited for a counselor. Small round tables with padded chairs were used by other sites to dispel the institutional look.
- *Windows and lighting fixtures.* To the extent possible, sites attempted to incorporate large windows or glass walls facing exterior plantings or trees. Indirect lighting was also frequently used. *Racine Workforce Development Center* replaced a wall with windows, allowing light to enter and giving customers a view to the outside.
- *Pleasing colors and motivational wall posters.* Most Centers used a combination of light blue, gray and green with maroon accents and buff walls. Posters and prints were carefully selected to enhance the colors, and offsets were used for glassed-in bulletin boards or signs.

Other features incorporated into the Resource Room and One-Stop design emphasized a non-bureaucratic approach; designers wanted to move away from the “take a number and wait” image. The placement of the reception desk and greeters near the Center entrance, for example, was meant to be a gentle reminder for Resource Room customers to sign in and that assistance was available. The *Bloomington Workforce Development Center* was considering installing an electric eye at the entrance to the Resource Room, obviating the need for a sign-in clipboard.

Other subtle layout service features, covered in more detail in

The metaphor of the Resource Room as “like a library” was commonly expressed.

Developing an enticing environment where customers feel comfortable means using attractive decor, comfortable furnishings, and ample lighting.

other chapters, are designed to help individuals feel comfortable within the self-service atmosphere by creating an atmosphere of inclusiveness. For example, several Centers have “Kids Spaces” with small tables, chairs, and a few books and toys, signaling to parents that children are allowed. Facilitative equipment for those with disabilities or other special needs were also provided, as is discussed more fully in the chapter to follow.

*The **Resource Center Development Guide**, listed in the Resource List in Appendix B, provides excellent guidance in effective design principles.*

Examples of Designs that Facilitate Accessibility

The *Racine Workforce Development Center’s* Resource Room combines pleasant surroundings with good design. The Help Desk is located in the center of the Resource Room, allowing staff to monitor all parts of the Room as well as to easily assist customers who ask for, or who may appear to need, assistance. The Room is also designed as a comfortable working environment, with 21 computers located in an area separate from a resource library comprised of publications, books and periodicals. Two other rooms located nearby consist of the Career Development Center, which houses resources on assessment and career exploration and 4 personal computers, and the Academic Improvement Center, which is a satellite campus of a local technical college with computers with instructional programs that allow customers to work in a self-paced environment to improve their basic academic and computer skills.

The *Anoka County Workforce Center’s* Resource Room provides a range of information, resources, and services in one large area. Computers located in the center of the area are identified as “Computers for Job Listings,” near the ES staff desk that assists with job matches. As one enters the area, customers may use computers for resume and cover letter writing, career information and keyboard training. Copy and fax machines are located in an area off to one side of the Resource Room, near video monitors that have headphones. Three rooms with windows into the larger resource area consist of an area for making phone calls, a testing room, and a Job Club room. Offices located in the back of the Center are used by a dislocated worker counselor, an Educational Opportunity Center staff person (who provides assessment and education related services), and the supervisor for the resource area. The décor—gray and blue with touches of maroon, windows that provide a view of the trees outside, and plants—enhances the room’s quiet, professional atmosphere.